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CH'AN NEWSLETTER

No. 17 November 1981

RIGHT ATTITUDE AS AN AID TO PRACTICE

Talk given by Master Sheng-Yen in the Intermediate Meditation Class, July 18, 1981

We have mentioned from the beginning that the goal of the Intermediate Class is to unify body and mind, as well as self and universe. When your body and mind are one, you will feel very comfortable and at ease both physically and mentally. If you can go a step further and reach the state where internal and external are unified, you will feel that nothing in the world is separate from yourself. The well-being of everybody is of direct concern to you. However, for the majority of you who have not been able to reach this goal, what should you do? On the one hand, you should still continue your regular meditation practice. And on the other hand, you should cultivate supporting attitudes in your daily life that will help you to approach this goal. You should realize that our ways of thinking contain great force. Therefore if we direct our mind correctly and act accordingly, it will shorten the time it would take us to reach this goal just by meditation alone.

The two important areas to work on in terms of attitude is ourself and our attitude towards others. Concerning ourself, we must try to dispense with at least some of our selfishness. In doing this, we would decrease our vexations within and be more capable of working for the benefit of others. Selfishness can be defined as seeking to acquire more of that which we desire, and seeking to avoid or get rid of that which we feel an aversion to. The desire to acquire what we like and the fear of losing it once we have it, as well as the desire to avoid or get rid of what we don't like are both motivated by a psychological attitude which is centered on the self. In fact, the prevailing mentality of Americans in general is to be over concerned with one's own benefit, and, by extension, with America's own benefit. So although the standard of living in this country may be high, most people are spiritually lacking, that is, they are unable to find security, tranquility, and happiness.

The basic solution is to accept that whatever is to come will come in its own due time and whatever is to go will go in its due course. Whatever you have right now is what belongs to you. So there is no reason to be proud of your successes or remorseful about your failures. There is no need to worry about upcoming danger or misfortune or to dream of a golden future awaiting you. Our present situation in life depends very much upon our family background, education and our own efforts. These factors can be

easily perceived by us because they relate to this life. But there are many circumstances that cannot be explained by these factors alone. For instance, two people of equal background and intelligence may not meet with similar fortunes. This is because the relationship of causes and consequences does not lie only in this life but in countless lives in the past. Thus if we meet with misfortune we should view it as repaying a former debt. And we should feel happy that in repaying the debt we now owe less. On the other hand, if we meet with success, this means that we are withdrawing the wealth we have deposited in our past lives, so there is no reason to feel any pride. In fact, the more we take out, the less wealth will be left in the invisible "bank". So we should take care not to exhaust our deposit, and we must even make an effort to deposit more by engaging in meaningful activities in this life. If we accept the truth that various inequalities have their root in cause and consequence, both in this life and in past lives, we will not harbor so much resentment and we will be able to take more positive actions in shaping our future.

The second point concerns our relationship with others. Most of us are overly critical and tend to expect too much from other people. If they are less than 100% perfect according to our pre-conceived idea of how they should act correctly in a given situation, we get upset. Instead of making such strict demands on someone, if we were to cultivate a more forgiving and compassionate attitude by asking ourselves how we would have acted in his position and by thinking of the reasons for the way he is, then not only will we lessen our own vexations, but others will find it easier to be friends with us and may even turn to us for help. There is a saying that fish cannot live in water that is absolutely clear. In other words, you should always follow the principle of being satisfied with only 80%.

Of course there is no denying that people with negative intentions do exist. There are those who will keep their distance when you really need help and when you are in a good situation they offer you their assistance, hoping that you will be nicer to them. But you should not think of such people as evil. Even if people take advantage of you, you should be thankful for the opportunity to repay a debt for a wrong action you may have done in the past. Instead, if you add resentment on top of your already difficult situation and think in terms of getting revenge on the person, he in turn will try to get back at you, and on and on in an endless cycle. But rather you should try to move him with compassion, that is, not only should you forget the incident, but the next time he needs help, you should offer your help voluntarily and unreservedly. He may be so touched by this that he may become your best friend. There is a common phrase in Buddhism: "causes and conditions are inconceivable". That is to say, relationships and situations are constantly changing. We cannot predict what may occur even a second from now. If a person happens to deceive you now, it is only a result of a combination of contributing causes and conditions. He may change completely given a different set of causes and conditions. A proper understanding of this truth will not only take away your strong aversion or resentment towards anything that happens to you but will allow you to influence others for the good and create a better environment around you.

NEWS ITEMS

On October 29, Shih-fu Sheng-Yen lectured at Hunter College on the relationship between Taoism and the spirit of Ch'an.

On Sunday November 1, Shih-fu was interviewed by WBAI radio host Lex Hixon on "In the Spirit". The discussion was based on the four stages of mind in Ch'an practice, namely: scattered mind, simple mind, single mind, and no mind. On the following Friday evening, Nov. 6, the conversation with Lex was continued at the Cafh Foundation on the upper west side of Manhattan, in an event called "Loft Dialogues", where the listeners of the radio program have a chance to meet the master and ask questions. At that time Shih-fu spoke on the topic of the four great Bodhisattva vows.

On November 12 Shih-fu Sheng-Yen gave an introductory talk on Ch'an to the students and professors of the Asian Studies Dept. at City College, NY. On the same day, Shih-fu lectured at the Ch'an Center to a group of students from Rutgers University who are taking a course on Buddhism there with Prof. Yü Chün-fang.

The Monday night class that Shih-fu has been holding on the Consciousness-Only school of Buddhism is receiving an enthusiastic response. Among the students participating is Nagendra Rao, an adept of the Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism in India.

Shih-fu is now giving a lecture series on the Platform Sutra, chapters 48-50, every Sunday afternoon at 1:15.

On Sunday, November 8, Shih-fu held a ceremony of blessing for Edythe, new baby daughter of Ch'an Center members Winnie and I-Chang Ma, born on Sept. 26.

There is still time to register for the second winter Ch'an retreat, starting on the evening of December 25.

Sunday is an "open house" for all visitors. The schedule of activities is as follows:

- A.M. 9:00 Free meditation
- 10:30 Chanting Buddha's name
- 11:30 Midday Offering
- P.M. 12:00 Vegetarian Lunch (donation)
- 1:15 Dharma Lecture by Master Sheng-Yen
- 2:45 Meditation activities guided by Master Sheng-Yen (including short talk).
Free instruction by Ch'an Center staff for newcomers.
- 5:00 Evening Service

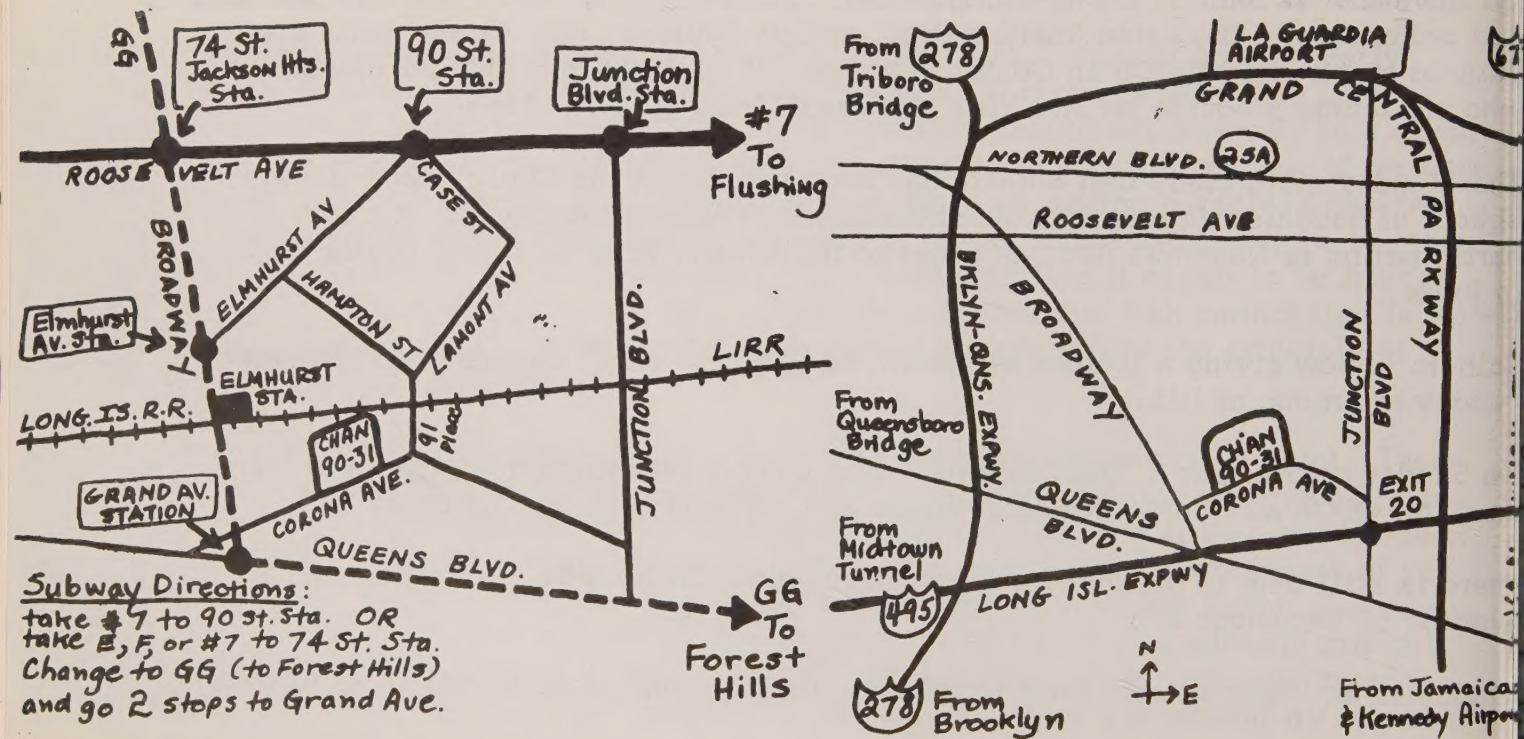
For more information on Ch'an Center activities, call or write:

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Elmhurst, N.Y. 11373

(212) 592-6593

The maintenance of our center and its activities depend upon contributions from members and friends. If you would like to help support us, any effort will be greatly appreciated. Those interested in offering time and labor may call the center at (212) 592-6593. Anyone who may wish to contribute financially, please make your check payable to the Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture, and mail to the address given below. Your donation is tax-deductible.

Of course, we encourage everyone to visit and participate in our activities.



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